

Chapter Eight: Once Upon a Midnight Dreary

"Vinnie Valentine, this is the voice of God. Wake your ass up!" Yuffie Kisaragi

Darling so share with me

Your love if you have enough

Your tears if you're holding back

Or pain if that's what it is

"Eyes On Me"

Faye Wong

The light was all around her, green and stinking like the bodies of a dozen corpses. It kept brushing against her skin in wisps, like claws trying to get inside her thin shield of flesh. Long nails like pickaxes suddenly emerged from the seething light and dug themselves into her chest, creating a lacerating pain that was rapidly spiraling down to her heart, seeking to rip the pulsating organ from its rightful place. Yuffie screamed and slapped them away frantically, but the tendrils of light suddenly grew hands and snatched her up by her arms, dragging her along in their midst to some unknown place.

"No!" she screamed. "Let me go! Vincent, where are you?!"

But no one answered her; she was alone with the light and the amoebas. Someone in the darkness laughed, and she tried to whirl to see who it was, who would be in this godforsaken place, but the light was all around her now, and she could see nothing.

Therefore, when the pit opened up beneath her, smelling of salt and dead things, she was falling before she even had the chance to scream. When reality finally dawned on her, and she knew she was going to die, and die alone, she let out a scream that resounded off of the far corners of the Planet.

The green light laughed at her.

Yuffie woke up with a soundless scream, clawing at the air with her dry, chapped hands. Her heart was pounding so loud that it drowned out the endless rain slamming against the window and the thunder rumbling overhead. She was freezing, and she was in a dark place that held no trace of the green light. It took her a few moments of breathing hard and glancing around in a panic for her to remember that she was in a hotel room.

Wrapping the blankets around her shivering body, Yuffie lowered her face into her hands and tried to calm herself down. *It was just a dream, she told herself. It was just a dream. You're not in that horrible place with the green light and the endless pit; you're here in a hotel in Junon with thin blankets and a storm raging outside the window. And you're not alone; Vincent is less than five feet away from you.*

Raising her face from her hands, she looked to her left to see the dark figure of Vincent lying in the bed next to hers. He had gone to sleep without a shirt (or a shower. Grossness!) and she could see the curve of his naked back facing in her direction. The blankets covered him from the waist down, and his midnight black hair was spread out in an inky pool amongst the white sheets behind him.

Before she knew what she was doing, Yuffie had thrown back the blankets and was padding over to Vincent's bed. The floor was cold underneath her bare feet, and the air conditioner had made the room so freaking cold that the temperature rivaled the substantial lows on the Great Glacier. Yuffie realized belatedly that she had left her shorts and tank top to dry in the bathroom, and she was standing around in her undergarments. She immediately backtracked and grabbed the blankets off her bed, wrapping them around herself until she felt like one of those super thick burritos that Barret practically inhaled at that restaurant in Corel.

Walking as quietly as she could over to Vincent's bed, she stood peering awkwardly down at him, wondering what the hell she was doing. Vincent's pale skin practically glowed in the dark, and now that he was showing so much of it, she had no trouble seeing him in the darkness. When people first saw Vincent in his dark clothes and large red cloak, they always tended to receive the impression that he was severely thin. Even Yuffie had always thought Vincent to be underweight for a man of his prodigious height. Looking at him now, she saw that Vincent was actually quite muscular with strong-looking broad shoulders and a smooth back whose muscles rippled slightly as he shifted in his sleep. She suddenly remembered how she had loved the feel of those muscles when she had hugged him almost a day ago, when he ridden up to Tifa's bar like a dark knight on his midnight black chocobo...

Yuffie flushed, a bit of heat on her cold cheeks, as she scolded herself for thinking of Vincent this way. He was a man, and she was just a skinny little nobody who everyone knew as “brat” or “pest.” Why would he even want to be near someone like her? But she really, really, *really* didn’t want to sleep in her cold, lumpy bed by herself with that window and the air conditioner less than two feet away from her...

I can’t believe I’m going to do this. I hope he’s not going to wake up grumpy.

Clearing her throat, she whispered, “Vincent, are you awake?”

The man shifted slightly, but didn’t reply.

“Vincent,” she called again, taking a step closer to the bed and feeling like a total idiot. “Vincent, wake up.”

No answer. Yuffie frowned and contemplated getting her pillow and hitting him with it, but when she realized that he would probably wake up and shoot her, she wisely repressed the urge.

“Vinnie Valentine,” she sang, making her voice deep and manly. “This is the voice of God. Wake your ass up!”

He stirred, but didn’t wake up.

Frustrated, Yuffie reached over and touched his shoulder with her cold fingers. The results were instantaneous. Vincent woke up, his right arm reaching backwards at an almost impossible angle and grabbing her forearm in a death grip, cutting off her circulation almost immediately. Yuffie yelped in surprise and pain.

“Vincent!” she snapped, trying to pull away. “Let go! It’s me! Yuffie!”

Vincent rolled over onto his back, his red eyes open wide and focused. He stared at her blankly for a few seconds, then released her arm.

“Yuffie?” he asked in a voice thick with sleep. “What’s wrong?”

She scowled, her arm still hurting. “What’s wrong?” she echoed. “You were trying to rip my entire arm off, you idiot!”

He was unfazed. “What are you doing running around like that?”

Blushing, Yuffie readjusted her blanket covering and squinted at him in the darkness. “I’m cold,” she said awkwardly. “The window and the air conditioner are right by my ear. My bed is lumpy, too. Can I sleep with you?”

Vincent was silent for a long time as Yuffie shifted her weight from foot to foot, more uncomfortable than she had ever been in her entire life. She knew her face was bright red. God, if only Vincent wouldn’t stare so much! Didn’t the weirdo have any tact at all?

“You want to trade beds?” he asked finally.

Damn! He isn’t going to make this easy.

“I’ll still be cold,” Yuffie whined. “I can’t even feel my fingers and toes right now!”

Vincent stared at her, his eyes taking in her covering of blankets. “Are you decent underneath that?”

Yuffie’s blush turned even redder. “I’m as decent as I’m going to get,” she grumped. “Please, Vinnie. I just want to lie down. I won’t even get near you.”

Another long period of silence fell, and Yuffie fidgeted as nervously as she could without displacing her covering, refusing to meet his gaze. Readjusting her wrapping of blankets and sheets, she thought that she would just die of embarrassment if Vincent sent her back to her bed, but she refused to beg him. It had taken enough guts just to wake him up and ask him about this. She had to keep some of her dignity.

Finally, Vincent gave his answer, not in words, but in actions. He scooted over a little and pulled the sheets back for her before turning to face the wall again.

“Thank you,” Yuffie said softly, slipping underneath the covers and rearranging her own layers of blankets that were serving as her pajamas. The bed underneath her was warm from Vincent’s body heat, and the scent of him was clinging to the sheets. Flipping over onto her stomach, she pressed her left cheek against the fluffy white pillow, feeling warm and safe with Vincent less than a foot away from her, even if his back was turned to her. Oh well, let him pretend she wasn’t there. His dark hair was still pooled behind him, a few stray tendrils lying close to her in curiosity of this strange girl who was sharing a bed with them.

Dark and dangerous, Vincent looked, sprawled out in this bed of whiteness. It was strangely enchanting, how good the darkness looked on him. How it leapt to cover his figure as if to hide it from her probing eyes. Lightening flashed outside the window, briefly throwing the inky shadow of the curve of his shoulders against the wall in front of him.

Quietly extending her fingers, which seemed to have suddenly developed a mind of their own, she reached out and gently lifted a tendril of Vincent's ebony hair, amazed at how soft it was, especially considering what hell it had been put through tonight. She curled it around her finger, loving the silken feel of the strands as they slid over her skin. She wished that she had long, straight hair like this. There were so many things you could do with long hair, and that was why she had finally agreed to letting her hair grow out. She had loved Aeris and Tifa's long falls of hair for as long as she could remember. Aeris' little twisty thingy or whatever she called it, was the most hilarious thing Yuffie had ever seen. She loved to tug on it and go, "Ding dong! Anyone home?" especially when Aeris said something innocent or naïve that had made her sound like a noodle brain. It usually earned Yuffie an angry glare and the threat that she was going to get bashed over the head with the Fairy Tale, but it had been sort of an ongoing joke between her and the late Ancient. She missed Aeris.

"Yuffie?" Vincent suddenly asked, jolting her out of her reverie. "Are you going to yank on my hair for the rest of the night?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, turning bright red and retracting her questing fingers like she had received a slap on the wrist. "Sorry," she said quietly.

Vincent didn't reply, but Yuffie hadn't been expecting one from him. Silence hung in the air for a few minutes as thunder roared outside the window, and raindrops pelted the glass like the succubus begging to be inviting in to do their ghastly deeds. It didn't take long for Yuffie to realize that she wasn't going to be able to get to sleep.

"I had a nightmare," she said before she could stop herself. The sound of her voice in the cold hotel room as she lie next to this cold-hearted man of darkness and shadows resonated like a lonely echo, chasing after its duplicates as if in search for a companion.

"It was really scary," Yuffie continued, talking more to herself than to Vincent and not caring whether or not he thought she was being a chatterbox. She had to tell somebody about her nightmare, even it was the silence around her or the smooth skin of Vincent's back. "I was all alone in a strange place. I thought it was the Green Room at first, you know, because of the light and the smell and all, but now I'm not so sure. I don't even know if it was a room at all, maybe just a vortex of light because that's all I could see. But...this light was alive, it had claws and teeth; I knew it did, even if I couldn't see them. I felt it gnawing at me, at my legs, at my arms, clawing at my chest, trying to rip my heart out."

Vincent rolled over and stared at her, but Yuffie didn't notice. She was once again lost in her nightmare.

"It grabbed me," she continued softly, shuddering underneath her covering of blankets. "And it started dragging me towards...I don't know what. I was really scared. My heart was beating so fast I thought it was going to bust through my chest. Maybe that was what they wanted..."

"They?" Vincent suddenly asked, and Yuffie jumped slightly. She hadn't even known he was listening.

"Yes, them," she said quietly, studying his emotionless face. "The voices in the light; I heard them...laughing at me. I hated their laughter; I really did. It was the laughter of those that are completely gone fruit loops, you know? Only these people seemed to have lost their humanity along with their state of mind."

"What were they doing in the light?" he asked softly. "And why did they want your heart?"

Yuffie was silent for a long time as she tried desperately to recall something, a tale, or a song, or some kind of bedtime story, from her youth that she had forgotten in her adolescence. The answers were there, in her past, but for some reason she just couldn't remember. "I don't know," she said finally. "I almost remember why, but the answers just aren't coming. Sorry."

Vincent just lay there gazing at her with his garnet eyes.

Yuffie dark eyebrows suddenly knitted together in a frown. "Hey Vinnie?"

"Yes Yuffie?"

"Is...it true...that if you die in your dream that you're going to die in real life, or you'll wake up dead or something like that?"

Vincent hesitated. "I don't know, Yuffie. That part about the dream being a premonition of one's upcoming death sounds too superstitious for my liking. Death comes when it chooses; it does not defer to the will of dreams. But I suppose it is possible that if one believes themselves to be dying in a dream, then the body may follow what the dreaming brain is telling it to do...and just die because the mind thinks that its cycle has come to an end. Sort of like when you weep in your dream and you wake up crying."

Yuffie stared at him in the darkness, mesmerized by the faint luminescence coming from his eyes. When she had first met him, she had thought that the deep red color of his eyes was the scariest thing in the world, but eventually she had come to realize that Vincent's garnet-colored eyes were actually quite beautiful, even if they could periodically turn as cold as the bitter winter or as empty as an endless void.

"Do you ever weep while you're sleeping, Vincent?" she asked softly.

He stared at her for a long time, long lashes dropping down so that only half of his ruby eyes were visible. He slowly turned his face away from her and gave his attention to the ceiling, his metal arm resting gracefully on the pale flesh of his naked torso, which was as beautifully sculpted as that of a marble god's statue fashioned by the dexterous hands of a sculptor from the heavens. His abdominal muscles rippled slightly as he breathed, and Yuffie barely suppressed the urge to reach out and run her hands over his hard belly.

But she did none of this, thinking her fantasy actions almost blasphemous during this delicate period of contemplation, of companionable silence and pain unspoken as she awaited his answer with a lover's patience.

"I might have," he finally answered, his deep voice so low that it was just a mere rumble coming straight from his chest. "When I was younger with the vibrancy and foolishness of a child. Those times have long since died out, though, just like this frozen heart in my chest. I no longer have the proper emotion it takes to shed tears, either consciously or unconsciously."

"That's so sad, Vinnie," she suddenly whispered, for some reason feeling herself on the verge of tears, maybe tears that she would shed for him since he was incapable of shedding any himself.

He snapped his head in her direction, garnet eyes suddenly hard. "What's so sad about it?" he demanded of her. "There's no tragic flavor to what has befallen me. It was just irony. What goes around comes around. The monster finally has to look in the mirror and see his true self, what's always been there but what he would never admit up to."

"You're not a monster, Vincent," she murmured feverishly.

"Yes, Yuffie, I am," he said in a low, deadly voice, red eyes flashing. "I've always been monster, hiding my true nature behind the blue suit of the Turks. The only difference between what I am now and what I was then is that then I was a monster just pretending to be a man. I have been deprived of no human nature at all; the only thing Hojo took away from me was my delusions about my being human."

"That horrible, Vinnie!" she suddenly burst out, oblivious to the lone tear that fell down her cheek. "You're so morbid! You have people all around you that care about you and the potential to lead a happy existence, but instead you continue to punish yourself for something that was never your fault in the first place!"

Vincent stared at her apathetically.

"Go ahead and call yourself a monster!" she continued ranting, impassioned by some unknown and unfamiliar emotion. "Live out your life wallowing in despair and die a lonely, miserable old man! I don't care!"

Yuffie rolled over sharply, turning her back to him and facing her abandoned bed, which looked meek and defenseless as it sat there stripped of all its sheets and naked against the ghastly low temperature of the room. The girl shrunk in on herself, curling into a little ball with her knees drawn up to her chest, gritting her teeth to hold back unwanted tears that were threatening to bubble out of her eyes like the rain from the thunderclouds. Why was she getting all worked up over this? She had heard Vincent speak of his "sins" and "punishment" time and time again, and she had just yawned and moaned, "Booooring!" Why was she so upset now? And she had to get all teary-eyed and emotional when she was lying next to him in bed, of all unforeseen situations! And with only blankets to hide the fact that all she was wearing was a bra and underwear! Talk about awkward and uncomfortable!

It's that damn dream, she told herself angrily as she pulled the blankets tighter around herself and tried to ignore Vincent's presence at her back. All because of that stupid dream where I was all alone, and the mist was trying to tear my heart out, and they dropped me into the pit with the amoebas and then they laughed as I died...oh god!

The sob she didn't even know she had been holding had burst free of her chest and forced its way out of her throat before she had time to choke it back down. She hurriedly clamped a hand over mouth to prevent any of its brothers and sisters from following in its footsteps, but the tears rolling unbidden down her face distracted her and a whole plethora of sobs slipped past her weak guard and into the silence of the room. That was the final straw. Yuffie buried her face in her hands and burst into tears for a reason that was unknown to her except in her heart. Her back heaved with the force of her weeping, and inside, she kicked herself angrily for being such a wuss. She wasn't a baby who cried over every little thing! What the hell was wrong with her?!

Yuffie didn't know for how long she had been crying when she suddenly felt the bed springs shift and the warm, hard feel of a body pressed against her shuddering back. An arm of tarnished gold suddenly reached over and gently grasped her around the waist, pulling her back against a chest of sculptured marble.

It took her a moment to realize that Vincent was holding her.

"Go away, Vinnie," she whispered through her tears, but her harsh words lacked a kindred emotion for them to fall back onto. In her heart, Yuffie knew that she wanted everything but for him to go away.

"No," was all he said, tightening his hold on her, and pressing his warm cheek against her tear-stained one. She felt his knees touch the back of hers as he curled up against her.

"Leave me alone," she murmured, wiping the tears viciously away from her face, trying in vain to ignore the warmth that was spreading across her entire body, originating from every inch of skin in contact with his.

"No," he replied calmly, his mouth against her ear, causing the warmth to crescendo to an almost unbearable degree. "Just go to sleep, Yuffie. I'll be right here...to keep you warm."

"O-Okay," she said shakily, her head feeling a bit woozy for some reason. Maybe it was the concept and fantastical reality that Vincent Valentine, ex-Turk and monster by his own admission, was holding her against him so gently. Or maybe all the fear and unfamiliar emotions had finally slammed into her with the shattering force of an out-of-control freight train on the road to nowhere. Either way, she was completely worn out.

So, nestled warmly against Vincent's body, she finally slept.

She had no more nightmares.